DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 183 496 SP 018 159

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TITLE The Place of Instructional Competencies...?
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Competence; *Educational Accountability; Educational Change; *Educational Objectives; Learning Activities; *Performance Based Teacher Education; Teacher Education; *Teaching Skills

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between instructional competencies and other items with which they are often confused, and then to explore specific examples of the relations among these items. Two of the reasons for this confusion are associated with the numerous definitions of the terms competency and the misunderstanding that some professionals have involving the relationship between competencies and items such as objectives, learning activities, and subject-matter knowledge. The author has suggested that the focus of preparation at the undergraduate level in teacher education should be on instructional competencies rather than on knowing about education. (Author/JD)

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NOV 28 1977

ED183496

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Title of entry: The place of instructional competencies...?

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A B S T R A C T

The place of instructional competencies...?

During the last several years, the field of education has been almost overwhelmed with publications on competency-based teacher education. There is confusion in the movement; two of the reasons for that confusion are associated with the numerous definitions of the term competency and the misunderstanding that some professionals have involving the relationship between competencies and items such as objectives, learning activities, and subject-matter knowledge.

The author has suggested that the focus on preparation at the undergraduate level in teacher education should be on instructional competencies rather than on knowing about education. The author discusses the relationship between competencies and other items and gives concrete examples.

The place of instructional competencies...?

During the last five or six years, the literature in teacher education has been inundated with articles, pamphlets, and entire books on competency-based teacher education. There continues to be interest and concern with competency-based education as illustrated by the continued appearance of articles and books on the topic (e.g., Educational Leadership, November, 1977; Medley, 1977.) Five of the nine articles in the November, 1977, issue of Educational Leadership have the term "competency" or a derivative in the title.

There are those individuals who find the topic inane and blase' simply because the term has been so prominently displayed in the last four or five years. That attitude may be unfortunate because at the present time this approach to teacher education is potentially the best approach available to improve teaching even though there has been a tremendous amount of misuse and misunderstanding about what C-B education is/is not and what it can/cannot accomplish.

There have been a variety of definitions of competency and competencies and this in itself appears to have added to the confusion:

> "Competencies are labels given to results of a comparison of a particular performance state of a process with a static performance standard or behavioral criterion" (Glossary, 1974).
>
> "Competency indicates an emphasis on the 'ability to do'" (Glossary, 1974).

> "Competencies are composite skills, behaviors, or knowledge that can be demonstrated by the learner and are derived from explicit conceptualizations of the desired outcomes of learning" (Hall and Jones, 1976, p. 11).

Additional definitions of competency can be inferred from the literature by analyzing the "competencies" presented by various authors. It apparently is rather easy to confuse goals, objectives, learning activities, and even knowledge with "instructional competencies." Nonexamples of competencies are certainly easier to locate in course outlines and the literature than are examples. Most subject areas related to education do not, in and of themselves, consist of instructional competencies, however. This lack of understanding is another reason why much of what is being called competency-based teacher education has had very little actual effect on the improvement of teacher education.

The purpose of this article is to explore the basic relationship between instructional competencies and other items with which they are often confused and then to explore specific examples of the relations among these items.

For this paper, I am using the term "instructional competency" to refer to rather general statements of the skills necessary (or thought necessary) for a teacher to achieve teaching and learning in a classroom situation. Competencies have a KNOWLEDGE base along with attendant or implied ATTITUDE and PERFORMANCE bases. These bases comprise the skill of a competency and are meshed

within historical, psychological, sociological, and philosophical facts, orientations, and overtones. But the history, the psychology, the sociology, the philosophy are not the competencies but rather supply components of the knowledge, attitude, and performance bases of the competencies. Some nonexamples of instructional competencies based on this definition include:

Nonexample 1.

The student will be able to trace the history of child developmental study from the time of G. Stanley Hall with particular attention given to major emphases and views on the matter of readiness.

(Probably a goal, a test question, or perhaps a course objective, but certainly not an instructional competency.)

Nonexample 2.

The student will be able to describe the impact of social, cognitive, and emotional development on parental attitudes toward the child.

(Perhaps this is an exam question in human growth and development but it is not an instructional competency.)

Nonexample 3.

The student will describe the role and function of the school in society.

(A goal? A broad test question? But what competency, if any?)

Nonexample 4.

The student will compare and contrast the major theories of learning.

Nonexample 5.

The student will view a videotape and classify the verbal/nonverbal behavior of the participants as examples of Child, Adult, or Parent ego states.

(Perhaps a learning activity?)

I have not necessarily meant to imply that the above areas are unimportant; rather, I have stated that they do not represent instructional competencies although they may form part of the bases of competencies.

Hall and Jones (1976) apparently recognized the importance of distinguishing among goals, competencies, and objectives but they did not address themselves to the confusion between instructional competencies and other items such as knowledge and learning activities. There continues to be this misunderstanding as illustrated by an article in the November, 1977 issue of a national publication (Blance, 1977, p. 126) in which there is the inference that interaction analysis is a competency. Interaction analysis is a tool--perhaps a device for accomplishing some competency, but interaction analysis itself is not an instructional competency.

As indicated in my definition, an instructional competency is a statement of a skill "necessary or thought necessary..." This phrase indicates our current knowledge of competencies--less than

substantial (Medley, 1977). A competency is actually one only when there is a firm research base to indicate a positive relation between it and pupil achievement. There are very few competencies having such a research base; therefore, it currently is necessary to attempt many things in teacher education without this base. Competencies that fall into this category (e.g., "thought to be necessary") should probably be called something like "designated" instructional competencies or something comparable until a firm research base is established whereby the competency is either rejected, altered, or accepted. The following items are offered as examples of "designated" instructional competencies:

Example 1.

The teacher uses an awareness of the nonverbal and verbal behavior of self and of others to further the presentation of the lesson or the interaction (Land, Smith, & Hilliard, 1974).

Example 2.

The teacher selects and uses instructional models appropriate to the pupil objectives (Land, Smith, & Hilliard, 1974).

Example 3.

The teacher responds to coping behavior of students (Hall and Jones, 1976, p. 45).

None of these particular examples describe "how to" but rather give direction to the teacher educator. Using such an approach with the second example above, one can evaluate numerous "models" without restructuring the competency statement. If and when a research base is established for a particular "model," then the competency can be restructured to reflect that information.

With the increase in Federal funding of selected areas of education, and as fads come and go, it is distressing that some individuals will no doubt suggest that there are instructional competencies in such areas. A current topic of immense interest is multicultural education. I suggest that multicultural education probably does offer knowledge and attitudes associated with instructional competencies but is not itself composed of instructional competencies. If this assumption is correct, then the most effective use of the knowledge in multicultural education would be to incorporate that knowledge to support instructional competencies rather than to teach it as a separate course or courses. Why offer another course in which there is the temptation to dispense a great deal of information, expecting the students to make the application but not in fact being able or perhaps not being willing to make the application ourselves!

An example of one view of the relationship among competencies, objectives, knowledge, mode of delivery, learning activities, and other items follows. All of the main objectives associated with the competency below are listed for the sake of clarity and continuity

but I will comment only on objectives 1, 5, and 6. The reader is urged not to react to the specific competency or to the particular objectives but rather to the relationships. Keep in mind that we are working with pre-student teachers.

Competency ("Designated" instructional) - THE TEACHER SELECTS AND USES INSTRUCTIONAL MODELS APPROPRIATE TO THE PUPIL OBJECTIVES.

Objectives:

*1) Distinguishes among concepts, facts, skills, generalizations, values, and intellectual processes.

(a) Concepts:
From psychology: The student learns an operational definition of concept.
From history: The instructor provides an historical perspective on the use of concepts in teaching.
Mode of delivery: One of the modes of delivery for this topic is a programmed instruction unit.
Evaluation: The student is presented with a list of items and must select the concepts from the list.

(b) Facts
(c) Skills
(d) Generalizations
(e) Values
(f) Intellectual processes

Terminal evaluation for objective #1: The student is asked to distinguish among concepts, facts, skills, generalizations, values, and intellectual processes.

2) Selects specific concepts from the subject-matter area.

3) Estimates the significance of the concept.

4) Estimates the difficulty of the concept.

*5) Prepares a concept analysis.

Psychology background for this objective includes criterial attributes; concept examples; concept nonexamples; relations among concepts, facts, skills, generalizations, values, and intellectual processes.

Mode of delivery-The teacher delivers a lecture, then leads a discussion with specific examples.

Learning activity-While in small groups, the students are asked to select a teachable concept, to prepare a concept analysis, and to discuss the analysis with other students in the group.

Evaluation-Each student prepares a concept analysis from her/his subject-area to include criterial attributes, examples, nonexamples, and an estimation of the difficulty and significance of the concept.

*6) Selects a model appropriate for the concept.
Prerequisite: Demonstrates the steps/skills of the model (s).

Knowledge-At this point, the student is familiar with the subject matter involved with objectives 1-5 above to include a knowledge of the types of concepts and models appropriate for enactive, ikonic, and symbolic learners (Cooper, et al., 1977) and whether the emphasis should be more concrete or abstract based on the pupils.

7) Plans lesson illustrating the model for the selected concept.

8) Teaches lesson illustrating the model with the concept.

This objective represents the terminal performance base for this competency for pre-student teachers teaching concepts for one given model.

Some of the objections to this type of competency approach in teacher education include:

1. This approach takes a great deal of time and effort; (it does in fact.)

2. This approach is too behavioristic; (it is basically this type of approach, but the individuals implementing a program can do so humanistically if they so elect.)

3. Some competencies seem to be immune to this approach;

(these same competencies seem to be immune to any known approach, not just to a competency-based approach.)

4. Faculties may have to give up some of their academic freedom; (this approach implies close cooperation among a faculty in order to plan the program and to have a continuous flow of learning from course to course.)

5. Using this approach may mean that we have to stop teaching some of our favorite topics in teacher education or even our specialty because it may not be in fact associated with teaching in the real world; (this is probably correct in some cases.)

Some of the strengths of this type of approach include-

1. Coupled with systems analysis, it is fairly easy to distinguish among the prerequisite knowledge, the knowledge directly related to a competency, and the nice-to-know-but-not-really-essential knowledge.

2. The subject-matter knowledge (history, psychology, multicultural, etc.) is tied directly and closely (timewise) to the performance of the competency--a particularly important point with regard to student motivation.

3. This approach makes it relatively easy to tie to a research scheme to determine the effectiveness of the approach and whether the competency is accompanied by pupil achievement.

Two main reasons for the confusion in competency-based teacher education are the numerous definitions of the term competency and the misunderstanding people have involving the relationship among

instructional competencies and other categories or items. I have suggested that the focus in teacher education should be on instructional competencies-skills necessary (or thought necessary) for a teacher to achieve teaching and learning in a classroom. Some professionals may argue that a competency is whatever the individual teacher educator wants it to be, but that type of position is indefensible----our profession must insist on a critical analysis of teaching in the real world as opposed to dispensing information about education to our teachers-to-be.

These suggestions will not be popular with teacher educators because they imply a drastic restructuring of the field and all disciplines normally resist change, particularly major changes.

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